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1. AGENCY USE ONLY (LEAVE BLANK)	2. REPORT DATE	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED STUDENT RESEARCH PAPER	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE 1776 – A Critical Time in the American Revolution		5. FUNDING NUMBERS N/A	
6. AUTHOR(S) Major Charles B Buckley III			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) USMC COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE 2076 SOUTH STREET, MCCDC, QUANTICO, VA 22134-5068		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER NONE	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) SAME AS #7.		10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER: NONE	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES NONE			
12A. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT NO RESTRICTIONS		12B. DISTRIBUTION CODE N/A	
ABSTRACT (MAXIMUM 200 WORDS) Analysis of the opening battle of the American Revolution provided flawed assumptions that led to the development of a potentially catastrophic initial strategy. It would take the initiative and leadership of General George Washington to implement strategic changes that would preserve the rebellion. His efforts enabled the Continental forces, comprised of a small amount of regular forces and individual states militia units, to turn potential defeat into victory.			
14. SUBJECT TERMS (KEY WORDS ON WHICH TO PERFORM SEARCH)		15. NUMBER OF PAGES: 41	
		16. PRICE CODE: N/A	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE: UNCLASSIFIED	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT

*United States Marine Corps
Command and Staff College
Marine Corps University
2076 South Street
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068*

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**1776 - A CRITICAL TIME IN THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES**

**BY
CHARLES BUCKLEY
MAJOR, U.S. MARINE CORPS
AY 12-13**

Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: J.W. Gordon

Approved: [Signature]

Date: 4/3/13

Oral Defense Committee Member: MATTHEW FRANK

Approved: [Signature]

Date: 4/3/13

Executive Summary

Title: 1776 – A Critical Time in the American Revolution

Author: Major Charles Buckley, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: Analysis of the opening battle of the American Revolution provided flawed assumptions that led to the development of a potentially catastrophic initial strategy. It would take the initiative and leadership of General George Washington to implement strategic changes that would preserve the rebellion. His efforts enabled the Continental forces, comprised of a small amount of regular forces and individual states militia units, to turn potential defeat into victory.

Discussion: The Americans faced significant odds at the outset of the American Revolution. The War for Independence from Britain began with the Continental forces composed of a small amount of regular forces and states militia units fighting with no coherent strategy. The strategy implemented by Washington and the Continental forces following the Battle of Long Island in 1776 was markedly different from the initial desires of the Continental Congress at the outset of the American Revolution. The opening years of the Revolution were shaped by the lessons learned of the past. Historians and theorists of warfare from the 18th Century guided the formation of the Continental forces. Wars were fought for a specific purpose and were not fought over extended periods. This, along with the fear of a standing army led the Congress to rely on militia units at the outset of the Revolution. Further confusing the strategy development was the initial Continental success at Bunker Hill. The success in New England led the Continental Congress to several erroneous assumptions regarding the British strategy. The result was a flawed strategy that almost led to the destruction of a major portion of the Continental Forces. General George Washington was able to quickly recognize the limitations of his forces and the strategy he inherited when he took over as Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. Washington's daring use of amphibious capabilities during the Battle of Long Island and his concept of maneuver throughout the remainder of 1776 and into 1777 were crucial to the success of the Continental forces and prevented certain destruction at the hands of the much stronger British Army.

Conclusion: From a flawed strategy using inferior forces, George Washington was able to devise a strategy and implement changes that led the Revolution to a successful outcome. The initial failures of the Continental Army at the Battle of Long Island led Washington to reassess the strategy he inherited. Going against common consensus and the desires of the Continental Congress, Washington implemented a strategy of maneuver using the strengths of his forces to their greatest value. Without his ability and knowledge, it is doubtful that the American Revolution would have succeeded.

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Preface

Ever since I was a little boy, a musket has hung in my grandparents' house. The tag on it identified it as a British officer's weapon presented to General John Glover in recognition of his superior service upon the British surrender following the Battle at Saratoga in October of 1777. It has since been passed down the family tree and it now hangs in my fathers' office. This paper will analyze the strategy at the opening of the American Revolution and how it was changed based on successes and failures of the forces during battle. The contribution of forces with specialized abilities, such as John Glover and his regiment will be considered during this analysis.

I would like to thank Dr. John Gordon for his advice and counsel during the process of researching and writing this report. He has been an invaluable source of information and inspiration that has immensely assisted me during this process.

I would also like to thank my wife and family for their support and understanding during this extended time at Quantico.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Leadership.....	3
American	3
British	4
Composition of Forces	5
American	5
British	7
Strategic Setting.....	8
American Strategy.....	8
British Strategy.....	10
The Battle of Long Island.....	12
Escape to Manhattan	15
The Future of Amphibious Operations	17
A Critical Time	18
The Battle of Trenton.....	21
Aftermath.....	23
Implementing Lessons Learned	23
Changes to the Continental Army.....	23
Establishment of a War Department	24
Impact on War Funding	25
American Strategy Changes	26
Conclusion.....	27
ENDNOTES.....	28
APPENDIX 1	33
Defensive Positions and Troop Movements in New York 1776.....	33
APPENDIX 2	34
British Strategic Plan, 1775-1776.....	34
APPENDIX 3	35
The Battle of Long Island 1776.....	35
Appendix 4	36
The Northern Campaigns of 1776 - 1777.....	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY	37

Introduction

War is a matter of vital importance to the state; the province of life or death; the road to survival or ruin.¹

-Sun Tzu

In deliberating on this question, it was impossible to forget that history, our own experience, the advice of our ablest friends in Europe, the fears of the enemy, and even the Declarations of Congress demonstrate that on our side the war should be defensive. It has even been called a war of posts. That we should on all occasions avoid a general action or put anything to the risqué unless compelled by a necessity into which we ought never to be drawn.²

-George Washington

In the early stages of the American Revolution, after some initial successes, the fight for independence from Britain was almost over as soon as it began. The initial American strategy for the revolution was driven by the lessons learned from 18th Century warfare. The American forces, a rag tag collection of regular forces provided to the Continental Army by colonies now calling themselves states and militia units provided by each state on a temporary basis, could not compete with the strength of the British making it impossible to use the tactics of the 18th Century. In order to defeat the British, the Continental Army would be required to modify their strategy and operations as they went, implementing lessons learned on the fly in order to be successful. The task fell upon General George Washington to develop the strategy that would eventually drive the British out of America. Washington recognized the shortcomings of the Continental forces. His implementation of a maneuver based strategy, aimed at destroying the enemy's ability to continue fighting by avoiding his strengths and attacking his weaknesses,³ instead of a strategy favoring fixed defenses and his innovative use of amphibious capabilities in support of ground operations during the campaigns of 1776 - 1777 helped the Americans to ultimately defeat the British.

The American forces faced almost impossible odds in the attempt to defeat the British. The British were a formidable enemy that was supported by a strong centralized government that provided guidance, men, weapons, and equipment in support of one of the best armies and the best navy of the time. The American forces lacked everything the British had. The Continental Army was a hollow shell of a force. The Continental Congress provided little support to the American forces, fearing that the establishment of a large standing army would gain too much power.⁴ The army relied mainly on individual states' militia and a small group of newly formed Continental Army "regulars". These forces lacked the ability to comprehensively man, train, and equip a standing army capable of conducting operations in support of a common strategy. The American forces would never be able to stand face to face with the vastly superior British Army during a war of extended duration.

This paper will begin with a review of the background of the men who would lead the American and British forces during that period. The insight provided by this review will assist in the analysis of the development of the initial American and British strategy. The study will examine in depth the battles of Long Island and Trenton to determine their impact on various aspects of the command structure, government support, and strategy for the prosecution of the revolution. This paper will also touch on some of the issues the Continental Army faced due to the influence of the Continental Congress and how the lessons learned during the period influenced changes.

A main focus will be on Washington's use of amphibious capabilities to offset British advantages during the battles of Long Island and Trenton. It will concentrate on the critical support provided by men whose experience in civilian life provided the expertise and knowledge to carry out missions that were critical to the Continental Army's ability to continue the war.

This paper will show how the implementation of the lessons learned from these operations, along with the leadership capabilities and military knowledge of Washington enabled the Continental Army to turn potential defeat into victory.

Leadership

American

George Washington was serving as a Virginia delegate to the Second Continental Congress when he was elected as the first Commander in Chief of the Continental Army in 1775 following the battles at Lexington and Concord. He was the son of a tobacco plantation owner in colonial Virginia. He served as a senior officer fighting alongside the British during the French and Indian War. During the war he held positions as a major in the Virginia Regiment, an aide to British General Edward Braddock, and as a Colonel and the Commander of the Virginia Regiment. Washington was a student of war and spent his time studying British Army organization and tactics. In 1756, Washington requested copies of Humphrey Bland's *Treatise of Military Discipline* which was used as a guide for British Army leaders.⁵ It was highly encouraged reading for his commanders.

Upon returning to Virginia after the French and Indian War, Washington was appointed as the Commander in Chief of Virginian Forces. The post would serve as Washington's introduction to the capabilities of militia and the difficulties associated with using them in operations. His experience with both the British Army and militia guided his strategy development. He did not have a favorable view of defensive positions, feeling that they limited the commanders' ability to develop intelligence regarding the enemy and removed the offensive mindset.⁶ In 1758, Washington resigned his commission and would not serve in a military capacity again until the beginning of the Revolutionary War.

British

Like Washington, William Howe, the 5th Viscount Howe, came from a well-established family. The Howe family connections to the British crown helped the men of the family to establish themselves as military officers. When he was 17, Howe's father purchased a commission for him in the British Army. His first exposure to combat was during the 1747 War of Austrian Succession. The French and Indian War brought him to America where he commanded a detachment during the siege of Louisbourg and held command of the Light Infantry during the siege of Quebec. Following the French and Indian war, Howe returned to England and entered politics. In 1761 he was elected to the House of Commons in the Parliament as a representative from Nottingham. He was appointed governor of the Isle of Wight in 1768.⁷ He continued to serve the British Crown in various military positions and was promoted to Major General in 1772.

Howe was conflicted about his feelings towards the colonists. While serving in Parliament, he opposed the 1774 Intolerable Acts, which were proposed as a result of the Boston Tea Party as an attempt to quell the colonies increasing resistance to Parliamentary rule. As part of his re-election campaign promises, Howe stated that, if reelected, he would refuse to serve against the Americans. Howe was ordered to America by King George in 1775. He entered Boston in May, 1775 along with Major Generals Henry Clinton and John Burgoyne leading a force of 4,000 men to serve as reinforcements for General Gage and his 5,000 man force.⁸ Of the three, Howe was appointed as the senior officer due to his previous service in America.

Upon entering Boston, Howe, his generals, and General Thomas Gage who was commanding the British forces in Boston at the time, developed a plan to take the high ground around Boston. The colonists thwarted the plan when they began preparing defenses on Breed's

Hill which forced the British to reconsider their strategy. The British generals met on 17 June to develop a plan for a frontal assault on the American defenses, which were still under construction that morning.⁹ The British attack was delayed until the afternoon of the 17th, when Howe led the right flank of the attack. The Americans held off the first two British advances but yielded to the third. While the battle of Bunker Hill was a British victory, it was a costly one. The results of the attack would guide British strategy for the rest of the war. In October 1775, General Howe replaced General Thomas Gage as Commander in Chief of the British Army in America.

Composition of Forces

American

The Continental forces at the start of the revolution faced many difficulties with respect to the ability to man, train, and equip an army that was capable of competing with the professional British Army. At the start of the revolution, the majority of the forces prepared to face the British were militiamen instead of a standing army. The Continental Congress feared establishing a standing army, leading them to enact regulations and place restrictions on the federal government's ability to create a permanent force. Congress believed that the first line of defense should be a well-regulated and disciplined militia sufficiently armed and accoutered.¹⁰ Additionally, militia units provided by the state governments were poorly manned and equipped and were not united under a common command. Finally, no central government organization was capable of managing an armed force.

The first Continental Congress had met prior to the start of the revolution in 1775 to discuss grievances against the British government, but did not authorize the formation of an army.¹¹ Representatives could not agree on a course of action to address the objections. In the

end, an economic boycott was organized and a petition outlining complaints was sent to the King of England. The members of Congress were wary of establishing a professional army. The fear was that a professional army, under the command of a government would lead to unnecessary conflict with the British Army and could potentially lead to an armed insurrection against the fledgling Colonial government.

The Continental Army initially formed in 1775 around the New England militia units that were laying siege to Boston. On June 14, 1775 the Continental Congress established a Continental Army for the purpose of common defense.¹² The force utilized the militia units surrounding Boston and New York. Forces were also provided by the states of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia. While the colonies were responsible for the provision of men and supplies, the Continental Congress attempted to develop and implement a strategy. Shortly after the battles at Lexington and Concord, the Continental Congress voted to establish a 30,000 man force in recognition of the coming conflict. Congress utilized the militia units operating in New England colonies and New York as the major support for the army. Since militia units were brought into active service as needed, many men reported for duty and were compelled into service with little or no training or equipment. Enlistments normally had a limited duration of one year. This was the result of previous experiences where a militia expedition was hastily put together and the mission was rapidly concluded. General Washington was discouraged by the attitude displayed by the militiamen. As he stated, “Such a dearth of public spirit, and want of virtue, and stock jobbing, and fertility in all the low arts to obtain advantages of one kind or another, I never saw before and pray God I may never be witness to again . . . “. ¹³

Militia units were normally poorly supplied, relying on weapons and ammunition carried to battle by the members themselves. Prior to the start of the revolution, most militia expeditions

were of short duration and did not require stockpiles of supplies and no governmental management authority existed.¹⁴ After the meager supplies carried individually ran out, there was nothing to replace them with. Industry within the colonies was immature and could not provide the required amount of weapons, ammunition, wagons, and other needs of a large armed force. Many units resorted to seizure of goods from citizens. The seizure was authorized, but leaders were reluctant to utilize this tactic unless necessary so as to not lose the support of the public.¹⁵

Units were provided by colonies as the local government saw fit. Congress could request men from each colony in support of the strategy they developed, but there was no means in place to ensure the colonies leadership met their obligations. It was difficult to plan a campaign using multiple militia units to implement a strategy developed hundreds of miles away.¹⁶ There were no staff organizations to facilitate planning and coordination of the disparate units. In previous engagements, militia units were reliant on the British Army to provide the planning staff. In addition, Congress did not enter the revolution with an effective “Department of Defense” to manage the war effort and provide strategic guidance.

British

In his study of the British Army in the American Revolution, Edward Curtis states that the regular British Army in America consisted of 18 infantry regiments numbering 8,580 men.¹⁷ Each regiment consisted of ten companies, one of grenadiers, one of light infantry, and eight infantry. The grenadiers and light infantry were normally placed on the flank of the infantry companies. Many British officers were reluctant to fight against the colonists during the revolution. General Howe once stated that he was unwillingly participating in the war and was only following orders.¹⁸ Recruiting efforts produced little results and the practice of purchasing

commissions was common. The British relied heavily on German mercenaries known as “Hessians” to augment the British Army.

The British Army is normally depicted as a professional organization that was highly trained and capable. In reality, the army suffered from some of the same problems as the Americans. Due to the distances involved between Britain and America, British units were rarely able to provide adequate weapons and supplies. The lack of available manpower and the need to protect across large areas made British supplies and supply trains susceptible to guerrilla attacks. The British Army was left to acquire their own supplies and ended up supplementing their supply stockpiles with support from American citizens known as Loyalists due to their support for the British Crown.¹⁹

Initial Strategic Setting

American Strategy

The Continental Congress developed the initial American strategy in an attempt to show support for the patriots in New England balanced against the desire to remain seen as loyal to the British government. Washington became fully involved in the rebellion following the actions by the patriots at Lexington and Concord, accepting the role of Commander in Chief of American forces in June of 1775.²⁰ The results of the battle of Bunker Hill informed the initial strategy created by Congress prior to Washington’s assignment as Commander in Chief.

During the initial battle, the belief of the British commanders that they were facing forces of minimal skill and training led them to send wave after wave of assault forces against the American defenses. The battle was a costly victory for the British:

When they counted their dead, the British recognized a bitter lesson: since their soldiers could only be replaced at great cost from overseas, they could not again suffer the major casualties by attacking embattled American farmers who had

defenses to crouch behind. When Washington became conscious of this British conclusion, it was to have a major effect on his strategy.²¹

The misinterpretation of the actions at Bunker Hill led to an American strategy developed according to erroneous assumptions. The first was the idea that the British would continue to assault prepared defenses of Continental forces. Second, the Continental Army was primarily composed of militia. It was believed that the militia would be able to defeat British troops on short notice.²² The final assumption was guided by the theorists and experience of 18th century warfare where wars were decided by one large battle. The final assumption was supported by the experience of militia units during previous short lived expeditions where the mission was quickly accomplished. These assumptions, along with the fear of a standing army led Congress to develop a strategy based on the formation of strong defensive positions around what they determined to be key territories.

The Americans understood that in order to defeat the British they had to face the British in battle. As Dave Palmer states in his book *The Way of the Fox*, “Washington quickly grasped the dilemma in the new rules: if he fought, he could lose it all, yet if he refused to fight, he could lose it all.”²³ Washington understood how the limitations of his army and the restrictions placed on him by the strategy developed by Congress could lead to potential disaster when facing the British Army. Washington began to formulate a new strategy that would address the limitations. The question became what location would provide the Americans with the best advantage and chances of victory in battle. At this point in the war, Congress was no longer acting as war planners leaving that responsibility to Washington and his generals but their influence remained. Congress possessed great confidence in Washington’s judgment that they granted him the ability to field troops as he saw fit, without their guidance and direction.²⁴ Washington’s created a

strategy that would bring battle to the British while honoring the intent of Congress. Washington would begin the American Revolution in the New York area.

Congress determined the defense of New York as vital to the success of the revolution. The ability to use the port facilities, maintaining the lines of communication between the Mid-Atlantic States and New England states, and maintaining the support of the population was critical to the continuation of the independence effort. Washington agreed with Congress that the abandonment of a major city would be disastrous.²⁵ The lessons learned from Bunker Hill guided his development of a strategy to defend New York. In the development of the strategy, Washington recognized the limitations of his forces and he balanced their capabilities against their performance when defending a fortified position. He also understood that many of the British did not want to fight and desired a peaceful solution in an attempt to avoid a repeat of the loss of life at Bunker Hill. Washington developed a prepared set of fortifications to defend the New York area. Appendix 1 is a depiction of the New York area battles and defenses.²⁶

British Strategy

The changes to leadership in Britain following the Continental Army victories at the battle of Bunker Hill and Ticonderoga in 1775 provided the British war effort a renewed sense of purpose and direction entering 1776. William Legge, The Second Earl of Dartmouth, the British Secretary of State to the Colonies at the start of the Revolution, favored redeploying British troops from New England to support the Loyalist efforts in the Southern Colonies. When the Patriots defeated the Loyalist effort in North Carolina, the British forces sent to land in support of the Loyalists did not land and instead returned to Boston. Shortly before his removal as colonial secretary in November 1775, Lord Dartmouth ordered the evacuation of Boston instead of maintaining defensive positions throughout the area. General Howe, commander of British

forces did not receive the evacuation order until after George Germain; the First Viscount Sackville replaced Lord Dartmouth as the colonial secretary on 10 November 1775. Lord Germain seemed to favor military action over a peaceful solution that Lord Dartmouth supported and believed that his position should be more involved in the formulation of military strategy. This belief fed his desire to control the appointment of military commanders, the distribution of resources between theatres, and the organization of movement and supplies.²⁷ The Continental Army siege of Boston forced the evacuation of British forces in March of 1776.²⁸

The British began the search for a new strategy. Guiding the British strategy development was the overall strategic goal of reestablishing the colonies as a productive element of the British Empire while protecting other British assets and colonies throughout the empire. A naval blockade focusing on New England would be a non-violent means of preventing the rebellion from spreading to areas loyal to the crown and forcing the colonists into reconciliation.²⁹ Concern for the potential extended duration of the operation and the large British force requirements eliminated a blockade as an option. A full scale assault on the Colonial Army strongholds was also discounted. The cost of this strategy, in both human lives and monetary amounts, was deemed unacceptable to British leadership and unappealing to British Army leadership.

The accepted strategy was a mix of multiple courses of action designed to mitigate the worst potential effects. General Howe had been developing a plan to take New York and the Hudson River Valley since October of 1775. The New York area was seen as a critical point where the rebellion could be divided, isolating the American forces in New England from support to the south. British Loyalist forces in the New York area had been quiet to this point; a British invasion would enable them to be more overt in their support, allowing the British Army

to field more men in contested areas while the Loyalists held the New York area. The plan was supported by British leadership and approval was granted. The plan involved a force of 15,000 British troops invading the New York City area, supported by a force made up of British, Canadians, and indians moving south from Canada along the Hudson River valley. A guard of 5000 troops would hold Boston in an attempt to split the American forces. It was expected that the presence of British forces in New York would be supported by loyalist groups located on Long Island.³⁰ The plan was also developed under the belief that the Continental Army would not pose a large risk to British forces.³¹ Appendix 2 is a map of the British Strategic Plan of 1776.³²

Even with approved assault plans, the British remained convinced that a peaceful solution was preferable to armed conflict. Upon arriving in New York Bay in 1776, General Howe submitted offers of peace to the Americans which were rebuked by the Continental forces, as well as by the Continental Congress. The first attempt at a peaceful negotiation ended when General Washington responded negatively to attempts to meet personally with General Howe. In July of 1776, General Howe sent a declaration to General Washington offering terms of peace. General Washington replied that the Americans did not need to be granted pardons for their actions.³³ In August 1776, Howe sent an offer of peace to the Continental Congress that would require the colonies to provide a contribution to the British government rather than a revenue tax. Howe never received a reply.³⁴ Howe's desire to avoid war would have disastrous consequences for the British Army during the battle of Long Island.

The Battle of Long Island

With the support of the British Navy, British forces had the luxury of choosing the point of attack. The numerous waterways in the New York area afforded ample opportunity to build a

decisive British advantage. Washington ordered his forces to prepare defenses in Manhattan, Long Island, and New Jersey, thereby preventing the British Navy from using the Hudson and East Rivers as avenues of attack. The British clearly demonstrated the inadequacy of the preparations when their war ships sailed up the Hudson River past emplaced obstacles and artillery batteries.³⁵ The forces defending New York constituted the largest troop strength the Continental Army had at the time. Manhattan was defended by 7,000 men, New Jersey but 4,000, and Long Island by 9,000. The force was mainly composed of militia with little or no training and experience. These troops were emplaced behind fortified “Bunker Hill” style obstacles. Washington had little confidence in this tactic against a strong British force, but was convinced by his leaders that the militia would stand and fight. As one of the commanders at Bunker Hill, Israel Putnam commented, “Cover Americans to their chins and they will fight until doomsday.”³⁶

General Howe decided to land on Staten Island to begin preparations for battle. By August 1776, over 30,000 troops were prepared to attack and began moving towards Long Island. On August 25th, 1776 the British forces on Long Island numbered almost 20,000. General Washington, guided by erroneous intelligence about British troop strength and movements, remained convinced the British assault would come against his defenses in Manhattan. The attack began on August 27th, when General Howe led 17,000 troops around the flank of the American forces. The forces surrounding the American defenses retreated to the main defensive position, located at Brooklyn Heights. When Washington recognized the impact of the British movement, he ordered the majority of his forces in Manhattan to cross the East River to reinforce the defenses at Brooklyn Heights. By the end of the first day, the British Army had demolished the outer defenses of the Continental Army, inflicted nearly 1000

casualties, and taken a considerable number of prisoners.³⁷ Appendix 3 depicts the events of 27 August 1776 on Long Island.

After the success of the initial assault, the British forces were in disarray. Howe's forces were spread across Brooklyn, lacked necessary supplies, and were exhausted from battle. In addition, they had taken over 1,000 American prisoners during the first day's fighting. At the end of the fighting on August 27th, the British found themselves staring at the American defenses surrounding Brooklyn Heights. The British forces ended the day so close to American lines that is required repeated orders to cease the attack.³⁸ Howe and his subordinate leaders began to question the capabilities of the British troops and the potential for the success of an assault against the defenses. One British officer noted that the American lines could not be taken by assault as the British units lacked the tools required to defeat the defenses.³⁹ Given the perceived level of readiness and heeding the lessons learned from Bunker Hill, General Howe called for a halt of the advance. The British would spend the next two days preparing for the assault on the American forces.

When the order to cease operations was issued, the British Navy was busy preparing to sail north up the East River, effectively isolating the American forces on Long Island from further reinforcement.⁴⁰ A British blockade of the East River would have prevented the Americans from escaping over water to Manhattan. The Americans would have faced the strength of the British Army from the front while being bombarded and blocked by the British Navy from the rear. The British Navy never sailed up the East River.

The actions taken by Howe during the battle of Long Island indicate a desire for a peaceful solution to the conflict. In delaying the assault, he may have been hoping for an American surrender in the face of the strength of the British forces. As one British officer noted,

“...they (the British) could not easily forget that they were fighting against men of their own race. Here pity interposes and we cannot forget that when we strike we wound a brother.”⁴¹

General Howe appeared reluctant to repeat the mistakes made at Bunker Hill. The caution exercised by General Howe would have major consequences for the British.

The British operational pause gave the Americans the opportunity to improve their strength and position. Washington ordered additional troops across from Manhattan to augment those in Brooklyn Heights. Among the units to cross the East River was Colonel John Glover and the 14th Massachusetts Continental Regiment, known as the Marblehead Mariners.⁴² Glover and his men originated from the town of Marblehead, Massachusetts. They were fishermen, sailors, and merchant seamen who were just as comfortable with their capabilities at sea as they were on land. Highly trained and capable, they would prove critical to the continued success of the Continental Army.

Escape to Manhattan

After two days of observing the British preparations for a siege on the American position, Washington decided that his troops faced imminent destruction if they remained on Long Island. It was decided that on the night of August 29th, the American forces would conduct a retreat across the East River to the safety of Manhattan. Washington would rely on Colonel Glover and his Marblehead Mariners to safely ferry the army across the mile wide river. Additional urgency was provided by intelligence estimates that the British Navy was preparing to sail up the East River to the north and sail through the Long Island Sound, closing off any chance of escape leaving only the option of facing the eventual British assault. Washington put the fate of his force in the hands of two regiments originating from Massachusetts; Glover's 14th and Israel Hutchinson's 27th.⁴³

Two critical factors would guide the conduct of the operation; time and weather. In order for the movement to be successful, all forces had to be moved overnight. If the British were given any indication of the events, an attack could be conducted leading to the destruction of the units remaining on the Long Island side of the East River. The operation required weather compatible with the troop movement. The crossing would rely on sailing vessels and flat bottom boats for the speedy movement of men and supplies.⁴⁴ If the weather did not allow for the use of sailing vessels, row boats would have to be used extending the time required for round trip movement. The longer the movement took, the greater the chance existed that the British Army or Navy would become aware of what was happening.

The movement began around ten o'clock on the night of the 29th. The two Massachusetts regiments worked in darkness and silence to ferry the American troops across. The skill of the sailors was critical to the speed of the movement. Shortly before midnight, the weather turned against the Americans, putting an end to the use of sailing vessels. The remainder of the troops had to be moved via row boats. The wind eased after a short time and the use of sail boats resumed. The two regiments managed to move almost the entire force over the course of nine hours. At dawn, a portion of the rear guard remained on Long Island. The morning fog masked the movement of the last of the American forces across the East River to safety. One Captain described the last movement:

Under the friendly cover of a thick fog, we reached the place of embarkation without annoyance from the enemy, who, had the morning been clear, would have seen what was going on, and been enabled to cut off the greater part of the rear.⁴⁵

The British were caught off guard and were not able to stop the American movement.

Washington's willingness to utilize amphibious capabilities in support of his ground based operations and the ability of specially trained troops to conduct the movement were critical to

continued operations. Colonel Glover and his men would be used in support of ground based operations with great success throughout 1776 – 1777.

The Future of Amphibious Operations

The success of Colonel Glover and his men greatly impacted Washington's strategy moving forward. Washington, having seen the benefit of a dedicated navy or at least a unit capable of performing as a naval entity, established a small flotilla of ships in the summer of 1776 under the command of Glover. The Twenty-First regiment was manned entirely of sailors and fishermen from Massachusetts.⁴⁶ The goal of the regiment was to disrupt the British supply lines. Within their limited power, Congress was either unwilling or unable to establish a Continental navy. Individual militia units along the east coast had been conducting individual raids against British supply ships, but there was no effort at a national level. Washington, as Commander in Chief, was not empowered to establish a navy but his role gave him ample ability to utilize regiments of soldiers that were detailed as sailors to carry out the missions. Their role was limited to small scale harassment of British supply ships until after the escape from Long Island.

The successful movement of forces to Manhattan impressed Washington. He requested that Glover and his men continue to serve the army in a similar capacity. Boat stations were established along the New York waterways to support the movement of supplies when land based transport was not available. Washington's growing reliance was reflected in his response to a request that a fleet be established to disrupt British Navy operations in Long Island Sound:

As to drafting seamen from Continental Regiments, it cannot be done, as their numbers have been reduced so low already by taking men from them for gallies, boats, and other purposes, that some of them have hardly anything left but the name; besides, I must depend upon them for a successful opposition to the Enemy.⁴⁷

Shortly after, Washington developed plans for the use of amphibious capabilities during the withdrawal from Manhattan. The use of Glover and his men enabled the use of larger vessels to evacuate the sick and wounded along with the army's supplies. The operation was not as successful as the escape from Long Island.

Plans began to fall apart when the boats Washington requested from the governor of New York did not arrive.⁴⁸ The second problem surfaced when the location planned for a medical installation, Orangetown, New Jersey, was determined to be unsuitable for use as a hospital. These two issues caused the plans to radically change. The walking wounded were given permission to depart the area on their own while the non-mobile wounded were taken to a casualty collection point from which they would be evacuated. The British were also a factor in the failure of the mission. When the British began their assault on Manhattan, Glover and his men were involved in the fighting and were unable to remove themselves from the front lines to conduct the amphibious movement using smaller boats. While the amphibious movement was a failure, the use of Glover and his regiment proved critical to the Continental Army retreat from Manhattan. Glover and his men would prove the use of amphibious capabilities during the battle of Trenton.

A Critical Time

Washington and his army would spend the remainder of 1776 trading space for time as he maneuvered south from New York through New Jersey. The escape from Long Island was followed by the losses of Manhattan, Fort Washington, and Fort Lee. The planned defense of New York and the Hudson River Valley had failed and the Continental forces were in shambles. Washington recognized the limitations of his army would prevent success if the strategy was not changed. The available manpower had been reduced to a force approaching 4,000.⁴⁹

Washington's aides informed him that almost half of his men were too sick to fight. Desertion was high, supplies were low, and morale was suffering. Additionally, the yearlong enlistments were about to expire. Washington wrote to Congress in September of 1776 warning them of the need to address these critical issues. Further large scale battles with the British Army could potentially lead to destruction of the Continental Army and the end of the revolution.

After leaving New York, Washington conducted a series of movements to the south through New Jersey as he continued to devise a strategy. The army managed to stay a step ahead of the British, who were cautious in their movements after the retreating force. Appendix 4 is a map depicting the movements through New Jersey. Washington and his forces reached Trenton, New Jersey on December 2nd followed closely by the British Army. British leadership requested permission from General Howe to conduct an attack against the Continental Army before the Continental forces were able to cross the Delaware River into Pennsylvania. Howe continued to be cautious in his approach and delayed approval for the attack. The British delay continued until the 9th of December which enabled Washington to remove his men and supplies to the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River.⁵⁰ Washington wrote to Congress describing the action and proposing the development of a defense plan for Philadelphia. He also identified the potential to mass his meager troops and make a stand in an attempt to prevent the British from crossing the Delaware and entering Pennsylvania. Intelligence reports delivered to Washington indicate that the British continued to approach the river in an attempt to cross, but were unable to find sufficient boats.

Washington remained convinced that Philadelphia was the ultimate goal of the British. As late as December 12th, Washington had not been able to develop a strategy to stop their advance. On December 14th, Washington sent orders to his Generals to observe the river to

determine potential crossing points and position their men in the most beneficial locations in order to defend against an attempted crossing by the British.⁵¹ At the same time, he recommended moving all non-essential supplies to Philadelphia in the event that they had to conduct a retreat in the face of a British attack. Beginning on December 15th, Washington began to receive intelligence reports that the British were moving their forces out of Trenton, north towards Princeton. General Howe had ordered his forces to form several camps throughout southern New Jersey for the winter. General Howe himself had returned to New York with plans to renew his campaign in the spring. Hessian forces fighting with the British would encamp in Trenton and Bordentown while British troops would camp further north. Washington began to recognize an opportunity to bring the fight to the British. Howe was so convinced that the end of the war would occur in the spring with such little resistance that he ordered one of his subordinate commanders, General Cornwallis to pack his bags and return to England.⁵²

Washington and his generals began to discuss an assault on the Hessian troops in the week leading up to Christmas. It was argued that a successful attack would raise the flagging morale of the Continental Army and take some of the pressure off of Philadelphia. Washington continued to display his efforts at being a student of war. Sun Tzu reminds us that knowledge of your enemy is critical to success in battle. Washington may have read Sun Tzu, but knew that by studying his Hessian opponent he could determine if any potential vulnerability existed. He learned that the Hessians were led by Colonel Rall, who was known as “The Lion”.⁵³ Intelligence reported that Rall stayed up late and woke up late. The Lion enjoyed parties and was more likely to lead his band on parade than his troops.⁵⁴ His troops quietly questioned his abilities to lead in the face of difficulties. Washington decided that an attack on Christmas night might catch the Hessians by surprise.

The Battle of Trenton

The final plans for the assault on Trenton called for a three pronged attack.⁵⁵ General Cadwalader would lead a force of 2,500 men across the Delaware to the south of Trenton. General Ewing would cross at Trenton with 700 men to prevent a Hessian retreat. Washington would lead the main force of 4,000 men, crossing the Delaware upriver from Trenton. The entire movement across the Delaware and the envelopment of Trenton would be conducted under the cover of darkness in preparation for a dawn attack on the Hessian force. There were many factors that could have influenced the outcome of the mission, but none were more critical than the successful river crossing. Colonel Glover and his regiment were again called on to provide critical support.

The crossing began the night of December 25th. Facing unfavorable conditions, the crossing was difficult. The weather did serve to mask the crossing from the Hessians who had ordered their security patrols to stand down for the night. Glover and his men labored through the night to ferry Washington and his force of almost 2,500 men along with artillery and supplies across the river. Other elements were not as lucky. Cadwalader and his men successfully crossed the river, but the adverse conditions prevented his artillery from making the crossing.⁵⁶ Cadwalader feared participating in the assault without artillery support and ordered his men back across the Delaware to the safety of Pennsylvania. His men would not participate in the attack on Trenton. Ewing and his men were also unable to cross the Delaware. His troops remained on the Pennsylvania side and did not position themselves as a blocking force. Washington's men would conduct the attack on their own.

Due to the poor conditions during the crossing, the movement took longer than expected. Glover's men completed ferrying the troops across around three o'clock in the

morning and the troops still had to travel nine miles to Trenton.⁵⁷ Washington's force split in two on the march to Trenton. General Sullivan, leading the right wing, marched along the river to the south of Trenton. Washington's force took the northern route in an attack designed to envelop the Hessian forces. Dawn came before the troops reached Trenton, but the storm that had negatively affected their river crossing continued to mask their approach. When the Continental force entered Trenton, the Hessian force was just beginning to prepare for the day. The timing of the two pronged attack was perfectly coordinated. Just as the first of Washington's army came into contact with Hessian sentries from the northeast of town, the beginning of Sullivan's force entered from the west.

The Hessians in the southern part of Trenton realized they were trapped and managed to escape over the Assapink Creek towards Bordentown, New Jersey. Glover and his men, who took part in the attack under General Sullivan, pursued the fleeing Hessians over the bridge. Seeing the futility of continuing to chase the fleeing Hessians, Glover ordered his men to set up artillery pieces on the high ground south of the creek blocking off the escape route from further use.⁵⁸ The battle was effectively over.

The Continental Army had achieved a desperately needed victory, albeit a small one. Washington and his men took over 950 Hessian troops as prisoner.⁵⁹ Glover and his men were given the task of transporting both Washington and his troops and the Hessian prisoners across the Delaware River to Pennsylvania. The weather had abated, but the river was now almost completely clogged with ice. Transiting the 1,000 foot distance became increasingly difficult as the day went on. Glover's men completed their mission on the morning of the 27th. The Continental Army had won their most important victory in that support for their cause was reinvigorated.

Aftermath

On the 27th of December, Washington sent a letter to Congress describing the events at Trenton and reiterated the need to extend the enlistment period of his men. Congress, on the 27th of December empowered Washington to use any means necessary to extend the enlistment period of the members of the army, which were to expire on December 31st. Washington returned to Trenton on the 30th of December to establish his headquarters, where he remained for a short period of time. General Howe, upon learning of the results at Trenton, rescinded his order to General Cornwallis and ordered him to resume command of his forces.⁶⁰

Washington moved his army across the Delaware again on December 29th and marched towards Trenton. He was hopeful of defeating a small British force while avoiding an encounter with Cornwallis.⁶¹ A second battle of Trenton occurred on 3 January 1777 when General Cornwallis, recently returned from New York, led 5,500 troops against Washington. Washington and his men successfully repelled multiple assaults by the British from the north and the Hessians from the east. As with the battles fought throughout New York, if the British had been successful in defeating the Continental Army in Trenton, the revolution could have come to an end. Washington and his army would survive to continue the war.

Implementing Lessons Learned

Changes to the Continental Army

Based on recommendations from George Washington as lessons learned from the battles of Long Island and Trenton, Congress authorized multiple modifications to the Continental Army. Manpower was one of the biggest issues they faced. From a starting point of an army of 30,000 men, Congress modified the requirements levied on the colonies requesting that they provide manpower in proportion to their population. The Continental Army never exceeded the

30,000 man limit and continued to require augmentation from states militias. Congress did modify the enlistment duration, extending it from one year to a minimum of three and in some cases for the duration of the war.⁶²

George Washington had spent considerable time studying the military theories and the organization of the British Army. As the war progressed, he made plans to build an army in the image of the British. These efforts were hindered by the national governance in place. Congress did not possess the power required to build an army in Washington's image. Lacking the ability to levy taxes against the states and the reliance on a quota system for states to provide manpower to a Continental Army greatly delayed the establishment of the army. The inability to field an army capable of competing on the field of battle with the British required the continued use of militia throughout the revolution. Washington's army would begin the 1777 campaign season with a nine thousand men, three times the size it was following the battles of Trenton.⁶³

Establishment of a War Department

In June of 1776, the Continental Congress established a Board of War and Ordnance consisting of five Congressional delegates and a permanent secretary. Following the model of Great Britain, George Washington had requested that Congress establish a war office that was similar to Britain's. The board was responsible for maintaining a list of all Continental Army officers, monitoring returns of troops, arms, and equipment, maintaining correspondence files, and securing prisoners of war.⁶⁴ The board was quickly overwhelmed by the volume of work required to support the growing revolution.

Following the battle of Long Island, Congress replaced the Board of War and Ordnance with a Board of War. This board consisted of three members who were not Congressional representatives. General Washington requested that the board have expanded responsibilities. A

major change was that the board was responsible for the oversight of recruitment and weapons production.⁶⁵ The board was also to serve as the single interface between Congress and the army. Prior to this, Congressional representatives would individually supervise the army by conducting limited duration visits to various locations. These changes were driven by the shift in strategy from reliance on militia to the provision of a Continental Army under a common flag.

The position evolved over time, gaining strength when the Articles of Confederation established a War Office led by a Secretary of War.⁶⁶ The position eventually became a Cabinet level office during George Washington's presidency. George Washington saw the need and benefit of an office that is centrally responsible for the maintenance and management of the Continental Army and that could act as the interface between Congress and the army to ensure strategy was developed in support of policy. He pushed for the establishment of the initial office and assisted in the creation of a Cabinet level position.

Impact on War Funding

The monetary cost associated with the preparation and conduct of the battles of Long Island and Trenton changed how the war was funded. At the beginning of the revolution, Congress did not make necessary funds available. Units were reliant on the use of paper money and letters of indebtedness to be redeemed by merchants and suppliers at a later date. In June of 1776 Congress authorized \$2 million dollars for use in the conduct of the war. By the end of the year and additional \$19 million was printed and distributed. Most of the expenditures went towards replacement of equipment and supplies lost during the battles of Long Island. Congress began to fear that if funds continued to be disbursed at the existing rate the result would be devaluation of the currency. Congress began to fund the war through the sale of government loan certificates, which are now known as bonds. Their attempts were not successful. Congress

also began to push for the states to tax their residents. The states were requested to provide funds many times during the war however records show little financial support was provided to Congress.⁶⁷ When all attempts to raise capital failed, Congress decided to print more money, but limit the amount in circulation to \$200 million.⁶⁸

American Strategy Changes

I confess I have not found that readiness to defend even strong posts, at all hazards, which is necessary to derive the greatest benefit from them. The honor of making a brave defense does not seem to be sufficient stimulus, when the success is very doubtful, and the falling into the Enemy's hands probable.⁶⁹

-George Washington

The initial strategy of defending prepared defensive positions against the British Army was effective at Bunker Hill. The Continental Army was able to repel the British advances and eventually force them from the Boston area. The strategy did not work as well during the defense of the New York area where the reliance of fighting behind a strong defensive position almost led to the destruction of the Continental Army which would have placed the outcome of the Revolution in jeopardy. The lessons learned from the battle of Long Island and the retreat through New Jersey guided Washington's strategy development for the rest of the revolution. The static type of defense would only be used one more time after the Battle of Long Island during the battle at Brandywine Creek in September of 1777.⁷⁰ The battle ended with the Continental Army in retreat and the British capturing Philadelphia.

Washington had been a longtime proponent of maneuver warfare, using amphibious capabilities to support operations. Following the defeat at Long Island, he returned to this type of mindset. His movements through New Jersey, leading his troops in a strategic retreat until the conditions were favorable for an offensive action where success was not guaranteed, but probable. His strategy consisting of limited offensive action, combined with continued

harassment of British forces, enabled a strategy of attrition in an attempt to wear down the British forces in addition to eroding support for the war from the British population in England. The first objective of Washington's strategy became not defending territory from British seizure but focus on the protection of his army and the continued ability to fight when conditions were favorable.⁷¹

During the 1777 campaign, beginning with the battle of Trenton, the strategy worked. Washington provided strategic advice to Benedict Arnold while he was planning an attack against the British at Newport:

You must be sensible that the most serious ill consequences may and would, probably, result from it in case of failure and prudence dictates, that it should cautiously be examined in all its lights, before it is attempted. Unless your strength and circumstances be such that you can reasonably promise yourself a moral certainty of succeeding, I would have you by all means to relinquish the undertaking and confine yourself, in the main, to a defensive operation.⁷²
The advice Washington provided shows his preference for a strategy of erosion of the

British Army that would guide efforts until the French joined the Revolution.

Once the French joined the American effort in 1778, Washington altered his strategy to take advantage of the benefit of having the support of their army and navy. With French support, Washington was able to continue the hit and run mindset but to also pursue conditions favorable for a culminating battle that could end the war.

Conclusion

The future of American independence from British rule was in doubt during the period 1776 – 1777. The war for independence was seeing British victory after British victory. The success of the Continental Army in driving the British from Boston provided a false sense of the capabilities of the army. This led to the development of an initial strategy that almost resulted in the destruction of the army. The Continental Army had been chased out of the Northeast and the capital city of Philadelphia was in danger. Several times, the Continental Army had escaped and

evaded potential destruction. Drastic changes to American strategy were required. George Washington realized the need for changes and implemented them. The change in strategy from one of defending strongly fortified positions to one of erosion of the British capability resulted in success for the Continental Army.

George Washington possessed the abilities and knowledge to recognize the shortcomings and strengths of his army and make the necessary strategic changes. His tactical acumen allowed him to see options for employment that others did not. He had studied the theorists of 18th century warfare but unknowingly implemented the theories of Sun Tzu. His innovative use of amphibious capabilities provided critical support and enabled him to save his army from potential destruction. His shift in strategy from one of fighting from prepared defenses in an attempt to bring about the end of the war in one big battle to a strategy of maneuver warfare, trading space for time until an opportunity to attack presented itself. He took a chance with a risky maneuver in Trenton, where he again used amphibious capabilities in support of operations. Washington recognized that small unit tactics such as these could be employed to offset the strengths of the British Army. The operation was a great success and emboldened both the army and Congress to continue prosecution of the war effort. His ability to adapt strategy to mitigate shortcomings at the tactical level of war and to work with Congress to guide the strategic effort directly led to the success of the revolution and the American independence effort.

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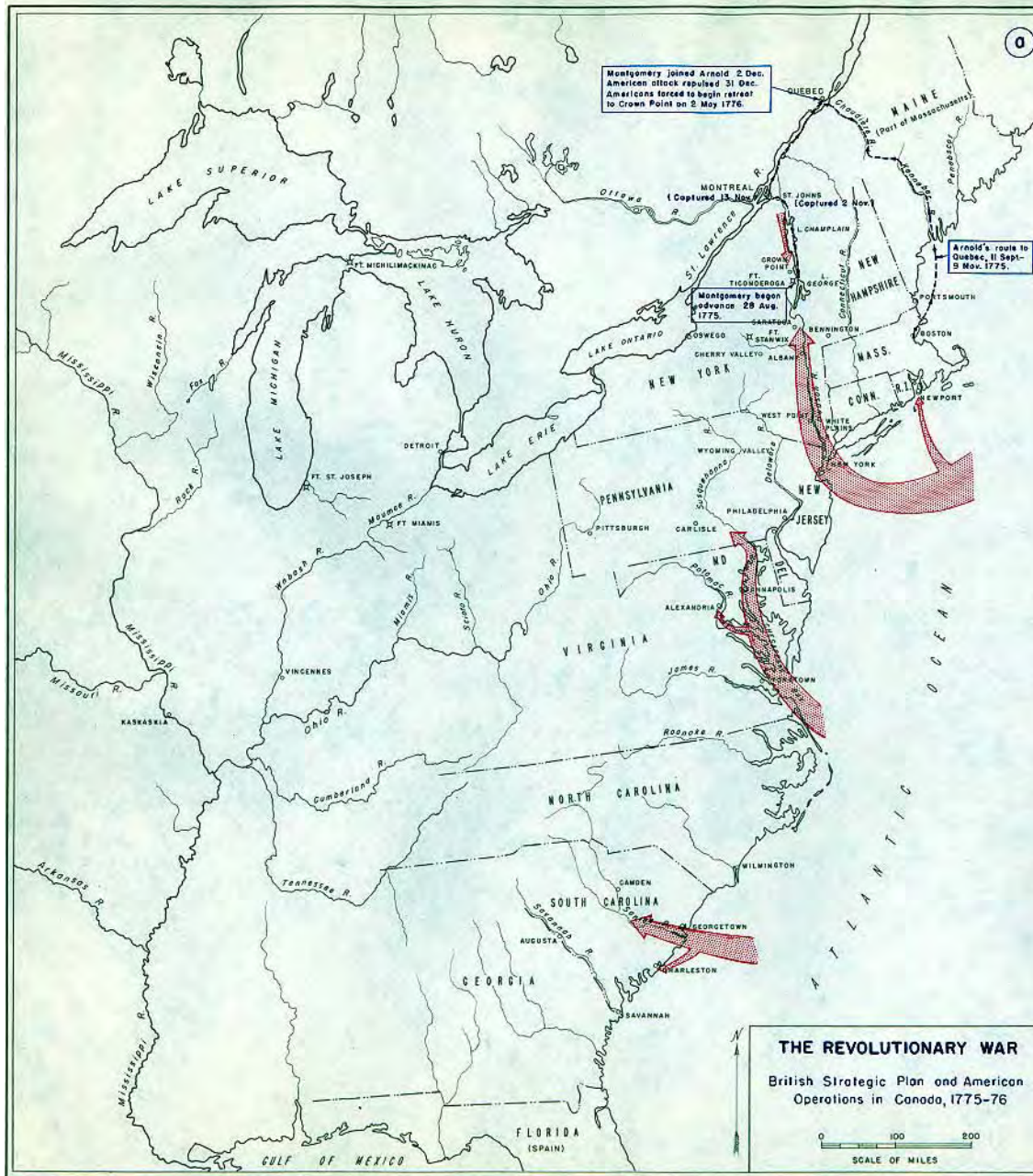
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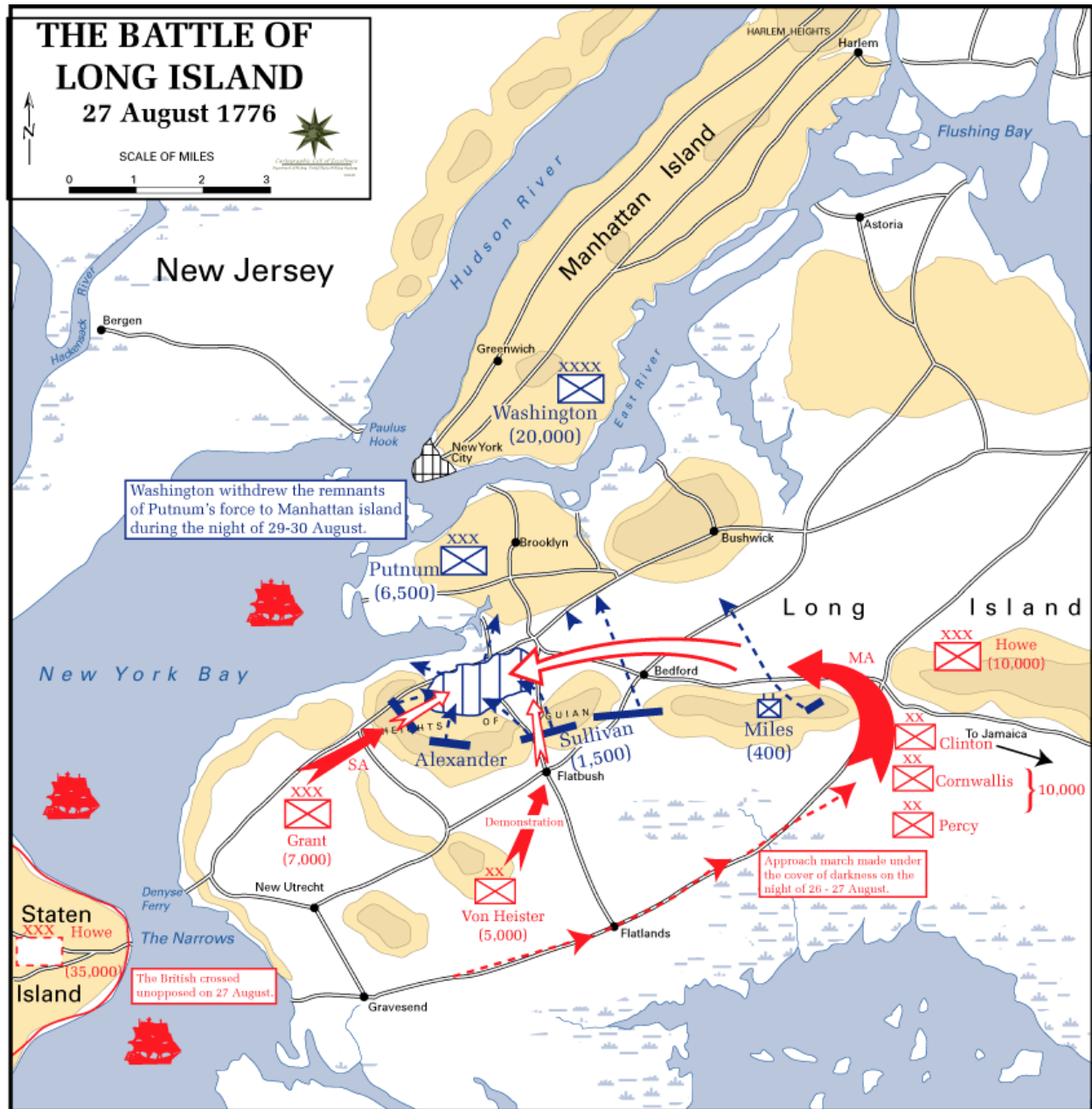


APPENDIX 2



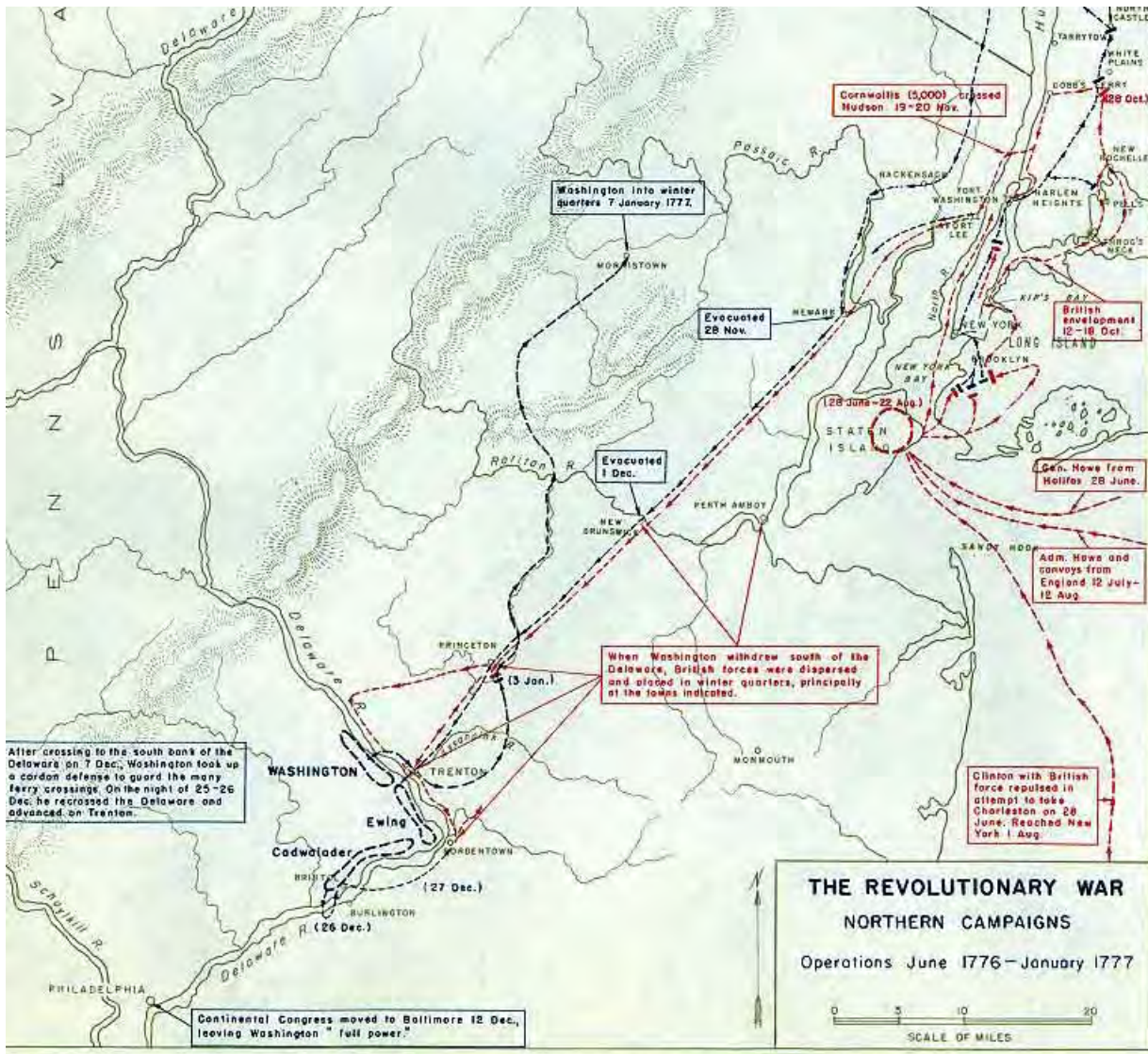
British Strategic Plan, 1775-1776

APPENDIX 3



The Battle of Long Island 1776

Appendix 4



The Northern Campaigns of 1776 - 1777

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